

# Film Distribution in Occupied Belgium (1940–1944): German Film Politics and its Implementation by the ‘Corporate’ Organisations and the Film Guild

## Abstract

The military successes achieved by the Wehrmacht in the first years of World War II, provided Nazi Germany with the opportunity to realise a long-dormant ambition of cultural hegemony. This article, focusing on film distribution in German-occupied Belgium (1940–1944), investigates the concrete steps that were taken to bring this new cultural order into practice and identifies the obstacles the German Propaganda Division (‘Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien’) encountered. Through various measures, the number of Belgian film distributors, and the number of films offered by them, were reduced. The market position of German film in general and of German film distributors Ufa and Tobis in particular, was fortified. Nevertheless, these measures did not lead to a complete German market monopoly. This would have been politically undesirable, but also turned out to be economically impossible. Towards the end of the occupation, the cultural, ideological, but also the undeniable economic mission to make German films as strong as possible in occupied Belgium, proved incompatible with the German war economy.

**KEYWORDS:** Film in occupied Belgium; Second World War; Ufa; Tobis; Propaganda and Culture

## Introduction

In the recently published monograph *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* Benjamin G. Martin analyses the National Socialist ambition to redraw the European cultural landscape.<sup>1</sup> The military successes achieved by the *Wehrmacht* in the first years of World War II, provided the *Third Reich* with the opportunity to realise a long-dormant ambition of cultural hegemony. Or at least to attempt this in Europe, sometimes in cooperation, but sometimes also in competition with Mussolini’s Italy. Martin’s book analyses the German propaganda ministry’s cultural-political project and provides insight into the workings of international organisations that were established for that purpose. Inescapably, the book also leaves some pressing questions unanswered. In a German-dominated Europe, how was this new cultural order brought into practice? Which concrete steps were taken to reform the cultural sector effectively

and re-orient it towards Germany? How was the fact addressed that the cultural landscape in a given society also has a distinct economic dimension, in which the laws of supply and demand cannot simply be ignored? In the pursuit of German cultural hegemony over Europe, to what extent did ideological arguments take precedence over economic arguments, or vice versa? How successful were the reforms Germany imposed on other regions? And what impact did these changes have in the long run? Was the clock completely turned back after the collapse of the Third Reich? Or were some changes kept?

Martin's excellent monograph cannot offer a definitive answer, because the answers to these questions vary depending on the culture segment Germany had devoted itself to, but also on the particular country or region in question. The success or failure of the Nazi (National Socialist) ambitions was, after all, dependent on many local and personal factors. In the occupied territories, these factors were, among other things, the pre-war situation, the nature of the occupying regime, the attitude and the ambition of individuals in key positions, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of local populations and the cultural practices and expectations of specific groups within those populations. Given that such factors prevented Nazi Germany from implementing a uniform European cultural policy, the answer to the above questions should be pursued in case studies of specific culture segments in specific regions.

This article highlights the German film politics in occupied Belgium, more specifically the reforms initiated and carried out by the German occupying forces, with the assistance of some members of the Belgian federation of film distributors. The purpose of this article is to analyse (1) the key measures imposed on film distributors by the occupying forces, (2) the underlying motivations and (3) the consequences of their implementation, both during and after the occupation.<sup>2</sup> The research presented here is based on (1) the extensive Film Guild files, which document the post-war trials against Belgian film professionals accused of economic collaboration; (2) the bi-monthly magazine *CINEMA* (1940–1944) which was specifically aimed at the professional film sector, and extensively documents the regulations imposed on the Belgian film community; (3) the secret reports that the 'Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien' regularly sent to Berlin to describe and to justify its activities. Additional information was provided by the magazine *Ciné Belge*, which was published illegally during the occupation. After the Liberation, the magazine continued, repeatedly referring to war-related events and calling for the punishment of alleged collaborators.<sup>3</sup>

At an international level, this article is one of the first detailed analyses of the German reforms of film distribution in the occupied territories.<sup>4</sup> This article is an essential building block for a future, equally thorough analysis of the German reforms of the Belgian cinema exhibition sector. It contributes to a detailed understanding of the concrete implementation of the German film policy in occupied Belgium. In the framework of the research presented here, data was collected on more than eighty Belgian film distributors, many of which were forced to close their business or merge into a consortium during the occupation. Information about these specific film distributors can be found in appendix I.

### **After the invasion: selected henchmen of the *Belgian Propaganda Office***

On 1 June 1940, two days after the Belgian capitulation, a German military administration (Militärverwaltung) was enforced in Brussels. The 'Propaganda Staffel B', which was soon



During the occupation, the bilingual magazine *CINEMA* (capitalized to avoid the difference between the Dutch 'Cinema' and the French, accented 'Cinéma') functions as a mouthpiece for the corporate organisations (the Syndicate Chamber, the Union of Cinema Directors, and the Film Guild in which they are taken up) and thus, indirectly also of the Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, which controls them. This is the cover of the issue of 1 December 1942. Notice the incentive to read the column "Corporate Life" ("Het Corporatieve Leven"), which functions as "Moniteur", i.e. as the film equivalent of the Belgian Official Gazette.

renamed to 'Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien' (PAB), was part of the occupying apparatus and responsible for the Belgian film sector. In practice, within the PAB, the capacity was exercised by the 'Gruppe Film'. This 'Film Group' was led by *Sonderführer* Robert van Daalen, a German Wehrmacht officer who was sent to Brussels from the Netherlands. Van Daalen had been involved in the acquisition of the Dutch film sector for a few days, but was no longer needed there after Hitler had allocated a civilian administration (Zivilverwaltung) to the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> Before the arrival of van Daalen and his Film Group, a man called (major) 'Kentel' or 'Rensel' had visited several film companies in Brussels to seize anti-German and other propaganda films. This must have been major Frank Hensel, the former director of the German Reich Film Archive, who would later turn up in Paris to seize films and transport them to Germany.<sup>6</sup>

In the first weeks of the occupation, a number of regulations was issued. These were finally summarised and supplemented in the 'First ordinance of 6 August 1940 concerning the new regulation of the cinema in Belgium' (Erste Verordnung über die Neuordnung des Filmwesens in Belgien vom 6. August 1940).<sup>7</sup> The ordinance was undoubtedly written by the PAB, but officially issued by the Military Commander in Belgium and Northern France. Only a limited number of similar ordinances would follow during the course of the occupation, as the PAB preferred to have Belgian organisations proclaim and enforce the regulations it drafted. It is precisely for this reason that the Ordinance of 6 August 1940 not only specified that films could only be distributed and exhibited if permission (for that specific film) had been obtained from the Military Administration (hence the PAB), but also that film distributors and exhibitors

had to be members of one of two existing Belgian federations, one for film distributors and another for theatre owners. The Ordinance made it clear that membership was compulsory for every person who wanted to be an active film distributor or exhibitor, but that nobody was automatically entitled to said membership. It was the Military Administration's prerogative to determine who was admitted to one of both associations. Given the importance granted to them, it is relevant to examine the history of these associations.<sup>8</sup>

The Syndicate Chamber of Cinematography and Related Industries (*Chambre Syndicale Belge de la Cinématographie et des Industries qui s'y rapportent*, hereinafter: the Syndicate Chamber) was a trade organisation, founded in 1913 within the Chamber of Commerce (*Chambre de Commerce*) of the City of Brussels. It is logical that the Syndicate Chamber established itself in the Belgian capital, for Brussels was the heart of the Belgian film industry. Most film distributors were located in the immediate vicinity of Brussels' North Station, enabling them to dispatch film prints by train. In 1937, the Syndicate Chamber detached itself from the Chamber of Commerce in Brussels and was restructured as an individual non-profit association. The Syndicate Chamber focused, as was made clear in the articles of association (which were updated in 1938), on three groups, each of which was recognised as a separate entity within the association. These were the film distributors ('*loueurs*'), exhibitors ('*exploitants*') and the various industries ('*industries diverses*'). 'Various industries' was a general denomination for those who were active in the film sector in other ways, such as producers and managers of laboratories or recording studios. In spite of the formal establishment of those three sections, the Syndicate Chamber seems to have mainly counted film distributors among its members. The exhibitors that had joined the Syndicate Chamber, were (according to an anonymous report) all owners or managers of major cinemas.<sup>9</sup> The latter should come as no surprise, since several large cinemas, among others in Brussels, were owned by big film distributors, such as MGM and Pathé. In other words, the Syndicate Chamber was the main representative trade organisation of the Belgian film distributors, already before the war. This explains the German interest in the Syndicate Chamber, as was made clear in the Ordinance of 6 August 1940.

The fact that the Syndicate Chamber was acting – or was at least perceived – as the representative of the interests of the film distributors, explains the establishment, in 1938, of an association that was aimed at cinema owners in particular: the Union of Belgian Cinema Directors (*Vereeniging van Belgische Kinemabestuurders* – *Association des Directeurs de Théâtres Cinématographiques de Belgique*, hereinafter: Union of Cinema Directors). The Union of Cinema Directors seemed quite new, but had its roots in older, local associations such as the Antwerp Syndicate Chamber of Cinemas and Related Professions (*Syndikale Kamer van Antwerpen der Kinemas en Bijvakken*), which had been established in 1916. The Union of Cinema Directors became the second organisation the Ordinance of 6 August 1940 was aimed at.

In May 1940, the German invasion had made many Belgians flee their homes. Among them was Marcel Coppens, president of the Syndicate Chamber and director of the Belgian branch of United Artists. Coppens would only return after several weeks. The PAB exploited this opportunity to force the Syndicate Chamber into selecting a new board and to reconfigure itself



into an organisation that strictly focused on representing film distributors. Coppens was replaced by the Belgian producer/distributor Jan Vanderheyden. From the outset, his contacts with the PAB were facilitated by Edith Kiel, a German citizen who had been living in Belgium since 1931. Officially she was Vanderheyden's secretary, but in reality she had been his life partner and the driving force (screenwriter, *de facto* director) behind 'his' film projects for many years.<sup>10</sup> Vanderheyden was not forced upon the members of the Syndicate Chamber: he was unanimously elected chairman on 9 July. Post-war testimonies show that it was generally hoped that Vanderheyden, along with Kiel and Robert Vandenneste (who was already the secretary-general of the Syndicate Chamber before the war and remained on board), would be able to avert German reforms. However, this turned out to be wishful thinking. On German request, the Syndicate Chamber was reduced to an organisation for film distributors only. In October, the Syndicate Chamber was therefore officially renamed to the Belgian Syndicate Chamber of Film Distributors (Belgische Syndicale Kamer van Filmverhuurders – Chambre Syndicale Belge des Distributeurs). The section for exhibitors was abolished because, in the new regime, these had to join the Union of Cinema Directors. The 'Various Industries' section was also abolished as it was so small that the occupying forces had no need for a separate association to coordinate them. (As mentioned below, some members of that last section were readmitted later on, when Jan Vanderheyden, himself a producer, acted against the will of the PAB by installing a 'production group' within the Syndicate Chamber.)

### **The corporate system**

In German-occupied Belgium, the Syndicate Chamber henceforth included all the film distributors, whereas the Union of Cinema Directors united all cinema owners. In theory, this had its advantages. In pre-war Belgium, the previous incarnations of both associations had failed to respond to the economic problems the film sector struggled to cope with. Both Belgian organisations lacked authority and representation, at least compared with, for example, the Netherlands Cinema Alliance (Nederlandse Bioscoopbond) in the neighbouring Netherlands.

The German Ordinance of 6 August 1940 brought about change by making membership to one of both Belgian organisations obligatory. In theory, both organisations were henceforth given the chance to defend their entire sector. They were also encouraged to work together in a 'corporate' spirit, which was a key concept. The corporate model embraced by Nazi Germany, imitating Mussolini's Italy, propagated the idea that different trade unions, labour unions and other groups of interest were unnecessary if all parties involved were represented by one and the same organisation (corporation). Theoretically, this corporatism led to a harmonious relationship between all stakeholders, towards finding a solution for economic, social or other issues that certain business sectors struggled with. In reality, the corporations were an instrument of power with which fascist regimes regulated economic sectors and drowned out any protest through extrajudicial punishments. This system was also applied to the Belgian film community. Throughout the German occupation, the Syndicate Chamber and the Union of Cinema Directors kept their members in a stranglehold rather than take care of their respective interests. As this article will demonstrate, the Syndicate Chamber, for example, was not there to serve its members, but functioned as a puppet of the PAB. Indeed, the Syndicate Chamber

served as an instrument, which allowed the occupiers to impose and enforce regulations without having to mould them into official ordinances.

The corporate system was simple but effective. The PAB let the corporate organisations issue hundreds of regulations that reshaped the entire film sector. These regulations were simultaneously distributed through numbered circular letters (referred to as ‘circulaires’) and printed in the magazine *CINEMA*. Within the organisations, these regulations carried the weight of laws. Those who did not follow the rules, were expelled from their respective organisations by way of ‘disciplinary commissions’. Since one was not allowed to work in the film sector without membership of said organisations, such expulsion put an end to all professional activities of the ‘culprit’. This created a form of extrajudicial jurisdiction. Without any intervention of the Belgian commercial courts, film professionals and companies could be fined or forced to close their enterprise, temporarily or permanently.

As an example: in December 1940, Mrs Delrez, the owner of film distributor Paris-Films, somehow made it known to the public that, in her opinion, the occupiers were planning ‘to monopolise the Belgian market for the Germans.’ These statements, which somehow reached the PAB and/or the Syndicate Chamber, were publicly dismissed as ‘fantasy’ or ‘fabrications’. Delrez lost her work permit, so Paris-Films had to close its doors. The trade publication *CINEMA*, to which the members of both corporate associations (i.e. all film distributors and cinema owners) were obligated to subscribe, but which was not sold publicly, reported on this and stressed that this closure was a direct result of the spreading of ‘false rumours’.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it was made very clear to the Belgian film community that Delrez’s professional career was terminated due to her publicly questioning of the corporate film policy.



Ms. Delrez’s criticism of the German film politics pointed to the crux of the matter and was therefore severely dealt with. The closure of her company Paris-Films was mentioned by *CINEMA* in the column “Het Corporatief Leven” (1 January 1941) and vehemently condemned in the article “Kwakkels den kop ingedrukt” (15 January 1941).

The corporate process required the active participation of several Belgian board members, who had to ratify and implement the regulations imposed by the occupying forces. There were advantages for whoever cooperated/collaborated. Whoever worked against it, was cast aside and

replaced by more compliant compatriots. This was made very clear when, in October 1941, the Belgian board members of the Union of Cinema Directors refused a request from the PAB. The association was simply abolished and replaced by a similar body with a virtually identical name (Vereeniging der Kinemabestuurders van België – Association des Directeurs de Cinémas de Belgique), but with more willing board members, who were given more power by the renewed statutes of the ‘new’ Union of Cinema Directors.<sup>12</sup>

In 1943, the Syndicate Chamber and the Union of Cinema Directors were officially dissolved. They were henceforth replaced by the so-called Film Guild, which was founded on June 30, 1943. Symbolically, this was a big step. The corporate process was now officially completed, as the entire film sector was now headed by a single corporation. In practice, the establishment of the Film Guild did not change that much. The Film Guild essentially consisted of two large groups. The ‘Film distribution’ group incarnated the Syndicate Chamber while the ‘Film theatre’ group was formed by the former Union of Cinema Directors. Just like before, both groups officially represented ‘their’ members, but were actually used to steer and, if necessary, to discipline its members. For the sake of completeness, it should be added that a third, smaller ‘Film production’ group existed within the Film Guild. At the insistence of Jan Vanderheyden, as early as 1941, the PAB had finally accepted that the Syndicate Chamber included a ‘production group’ that provided shelter for producers as well as others (laboratories, technicians, studios) who had previously been assigned under the ‘Various Industries’ section. This group would eventually be included in the Film Guild, but played a small role, since the PAB had no interest in fully supporting Belgian film production.<sup>13</sup>

When Vanderheyden was appointed as the ‘leader’ of the entire Film Guild, the management of the Syndicate Chamber (now officially known as the Film Distribution Group of the Film Guild) was temporarily taken over by others. The acting managers were respectively Walter Willems (a remarkable choice, as he owned the distribution company Filmsonor, which had been closed by the PAB on accusation of fraud, on 31 January 1942), Frank Van Heffen (owner of the distribution company Fama-Films, appointed as interim manager when Willems resigned after short while), Edward De Jong (owner of the distribution company Idéal), and when the latter resigned, Van Heffen once again. Behind the scenes, it was obvious that the PAB continued to call the shots. Having explained this institutional context, let us return to the early days of the occupation and look more specifically at the German reorientation of the Belgian film distribution market.

### **Film distribution in the summer of 1940**

The Ordinance of 6 August 1940 gave a binding and permanent character to a number of measures that had been introduced in the preceding months. The impacts of these measures were substantial on various levels. While cinema owners were previously allowed to select their programmes freely, and quite often combined two feature films in the same programme, a mandatory structure was now imposed. Henceforth, a programme had to include one feature film, one short film (max. 1900 meters) and one newsreel. This triptych was based on the German model (‘Hauptfilm-Kulturfilm-Wochenschau’) and was also introduced elsewhere in occupied Europe, for example, in the Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> The newsreel to be shown,

was provided by Ufa. In other words, it had to be a version of the Ufa's Foreign Weekly Newsreel (*Auslandstonwoche*), adapted for the Belgian market.<sup>15</sup> But the PAB had many other reforms in store.

The Ordinance of 6 August 1940 clearly determined that membership of the Syndicate Chamber was not a right that film distributors were automatically entitled to. Persons of Jewish origin, who since 31 May 1940 were not allowed to be active in any profession, were 'obviously' excluded. Persons who, for these or other reasons, wanted to sell or hand over their company to other people, had to get permission for it. This way, the occupying forces could simply seize companies, or force their owners to sell them at a low price. It is not known exactly which consequences this had for the film sector. The current state of the research does not allow to determine how many distribution companies (or cinemas) were closed, taken over or simply stolen. The Belgian court, in its post-war investigation of the Film Guild, seems to have had little interest in the expropriation of Jewish film companies. The court records do show, however, that the German occupying forces, from the outset, took action against other film distributors as well: the representatives of American and British companies. In July 1940, the Military Administration made the Syndicate Chamber proclaim that films from Great Britain (which Germany was at war with), as well as films by the American studio's United Artists, Columbia, Fox, Warner Brothers and First National could no longer be distributed. Later on, as of 9 August 1940, all American films were banned and were thus no longer allowed to be screened or distributed. Violations of this ban were considered as high treason. Film distributors and cinema owners who broke the embargo on American films would therefore have to appear before the German military tribunal.<sup>16</sup> This meant that the eight Belgian distribution offices of American companies (Columbia, Fox, MGM, Paramount, RKO, United Artists, Universal and Warner Bros), some of which had resumed their activities shortly before, had to close their doors. This ban on American films, which also had an effect on smaller distributors that had older Hollywood films in their catalogues, was not an initiative by the PAB, but was part of a general boycott issued in other occupied countries as well. The directors or other representatives of these American film distributors were excluded from the Syndicate Chamber.

The Ordinance of 6 August 1940 also stipulated that each film print had to be accompanied by a specific PAB admission card, in other words, that no film could be distributed without prior authorisation by the PAB. This meant the de facto replacement of the optional pre-war Belgian film classification by compulsory German film censorship. Films from Great Britain and the United States were automatically prohibited. Soviet Russian films, films with Jewish actors and with actors or by directors that had somehow fallen out of grace (Erich von Stroheim, Marta Eggerth, Jan Kiepura, Richard Tauber, Franziska Gaal, Françoise Rosay) were also forbidden. Non-German films about Germany and/or films about the First World War were not likely to be admitted either.<sup>17</sup> Although it was not made known publicly, the PAB, from the outset, denied the distribution of all films (or at least, most films, because sometimes they turned a blind eye) that had been released on the Belgian market before January 1, 1935.<sup>18</sup> Distributors had to pay the PAB a fixed sum for each film they needed approval of. Logically, this compelled them to only submit films they believed to have sufficient potential to be approved.

Films that, for whatever reason, were no longer eligible for screening, ran the risk of being requisitioned or bought at a stock price. Such films either ended up in the German archives or were melted down so that the silver could be recovered from the nitrate film stock.<sup>19</sup> This spurred some distributors into hiding their films, creating a black market.<sup>20</sup>

It is difficult to determine how many film distributors were affected by these measures, because there are no exact lists of pre-war film distributors. According to the PAB, there were approximately 110 film distributors active in pre-war Belgium, offering approximately 4000 films, including many older and, in some cases, even silent films.<sup>21</sup> In December 1940, when the corporate organisations published the first issue of their *CINEMA* magazine, seventy-five certified film distributors were mentioned.<sup>22</sup> Two of them were new. Before the war, the German companies Ufa and Tobis had been represented by Alliance Cinématographique Européenne (ACE) and Mercure Films (aka Mercator Films) respectively. In June 1940, they had opened their own offices, retaining staff members from their former representatives.<sup>23</sup> The German directors of the new Ufa and Tobis branches (Helmut Shaeffer and Erich Motzkus) were immediately absorbed in the board of the Syndicate Chamber. Besides the already-mentioned US distributors, the most high-profile distribution company that disappeared was probably Gaumont Franco Aubert. According to the PAB, the company had formally been allowed to resume its activities, but failed to get its films approved by the PAB, in other words, it was not given the opportunity to distribute films.<sup>24</sup>

Around August 1940, Tobis and Ufa combined distributed around 90 German films. According to the PAB, the remaining 73 companies combined, offered about 950 films: 500 French productions, 350 German films and approximately 100 films of Italian, Belgian or of other origins.<sup>25</sup> If these figures are correct, it appears that the number of film distributors decreased by almost 32% (75 instead of 110) over a few months and the film supply was reduced by as much as 74% (from about 4,000 to 1,040 titles). If we assume that some of the 4,000 movies, which were still officially on the market before the war, were not rented out or hardly rented out, a decrease of 50 to 60% might be more realistic. Nevertheless, it is clear that the supply was drastically reduced. Within that limited supply, the German films had a market share of more than 42% with 440 of the 1040 available titles. In reality, the market share was perhaps slightly lower. It is not known which films were released on multiple prints, but from a historical point of view, it is likely that there were more pre-war prints of French films. Either way, the market position of the German films had increased significantly, but, from a German point of view, could still be improved.

### Further restructuring of the distribution sector

Those who had succeeded to get work permits in the summer of 1940 were forced to rely on older films that had been purchased in the past and had been approved by the PAB censors. Purchasing new films was nearly impossible. The local Belgian film production had a small output before the war and there was almost no stimulation of the industry during the occupation. Only Jan Vanderheyden and his partner Edith Kiel, who helped carry out German film politics, were allowed to produce some new feature films.<sup>26</sup> Just like before the war, the Belgian film distributors were likely to rely on imports. The rules of the game changed





This advertisement, published in *CINEMA* (15 February 1942), illustrates how Ufa's branch in Brussels aimed at Flemish and French language distributors with a series of German films produced by Ufa (such as *Kora Terry*, 1940), but also by other German companies, such as Terra's *Jud Süß* (*Jew Süß*, 1940) and Wien Film's *Wiener G'schichten* (*Viennese Tales*, 1940).

significantly though. The big new German films that were produced in Berlin, Vienna and Prague (later also in Amsterdam) automatically ended up at the offices of Ufa and Tobis in Brussels. In theory, one could rely on other film producing countries such as France and Italy. In practice, distributors were prohibited to take any initiative in this regard. All contact with foreign producers/distributors had to go through the Syndicate Chamber and were sent through the PAB.<sup>27</sup>

The PAB would eventually have to accept the import of non-German films (which is discussed in more detail below), but initially it was not encouraged. Belgian film distributors hardly got the chance to expand their catalogue. However, this turned out not to be such a big problem. Cinema owners, who were not allowed to screen American films anymore, did not seem inclined to show German productions either. They would rather rent old(er) French films.<sup>28</sup> The market position of French films, which was already quite large before the war, was thus strengthened. This was obviously not what the PAB had intended. After several months, there came an intervention.

On February 22, 1941, the PAB imposed a new regulation through a circular letter ('circulaire n° 102') of the Syndicate Chamber. Circular letter number 102 had far-reaching implications and would become notorious in the Belgian film community.<sup>29</sup> According to this new rule, as of March 13, 1941, the members of the Syndicate Chamber were forbidden to distribute feature films that had been released in Belgium before June 1, 1937. It was crucial that the distribution date was applied as a criterion and not the production date. Older films were thus only excluded if they had been available for some time on the Belgian market. There can be no doubt that this measure was taken to push French films out of the market and to make way for German-language films, which had been distributed less frequently in Belgium in the past. The date of 1 June corresponded to the beginning of the new 'corporate year', which was thus also introduced. According to the German model, this corporate year (accounting year) ran from 1 June to 31 May. It is unclear why 1937 was chosen as a caesura. The decision may have been taken to give film distributors the opportunity to profit from the films which had been on the market for less than three years before the German invasion.

Also in circular letter number 102, the Syndicate Chamber announced that, by 15 March (only two days after the enforcement date of the aforementioned regulation), every film distributor who had less than ten feature films to offer, would lose his permit by 31 July. The short time period between the announcement and the implementation of both rules left no doubt about the intention. Smaller distributors were to be wiped off the map. It was also made impossible to save a film company by quickly purchasing some films or merging with another company, because such third-party transactions required the approval of the Syndicate Chamber (PAB).

In February 1941, when the aforementioned measures were announced, the Syndicate Chamber still counted seventy-one feature film distributors among its ranks.<sup>30</sup> By 31 July, forty-four of those had lost their work permits. They were allowed to try and sell their films but each transaction (on a film-by-film basis) had to be pre-approved by the Syndicate Chamber and the PAB.<sup>31</sup> Of the remaining twenty-seven companies, only seventeen complied completely with the new conditions. The other ten companies had missed the approval requirements by a narrow margin. They were allowed to stay in business a little longer and would be subjected to a further, unspecified 'special investigation'. This was followed by months of manoeuvres. Some firms found themselves forced to close their doors after all and had to sell their 'approved' films. Some more fortunate distributors were given the opportunity to buy films in order to reach the required minimum of ten. Undoubtedly, the PAB and the Syndicate Chamber extended some 'favours' during this period. By giving film transactions a green or a red light,



one could easily determine who would manage to get a quota of at least ten feature films. Furthermore, the PAB gave itself the right to grant exceptions and extend the release of films, even if they had already been on the Belgian market before June 1, 1937. To the outside world, there was no mention of that possibility. The authorities in Berlin were informed that such exceptions were only granted for films that had special artistic value ('künstlerisch wertvoll').<sup>32</sup> However, it is likely that exceptions were especially granted to distributors with the right connections. Jan Vanderheyden, who implemented the German film politics as chairman of the Syndicate Chamber, received permission for the continued distribution of several of his older productions, after March 31, 1941.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the distributors who were forced out of the market, decided to fight back. On 8 July 1941, when forty-four distributors already knew that they were going to be foreclosed by the end of the month, twenty-five of them launched a counter-attack. Referring to the statutes of the Syndicate Chamber, they convened an extraordinary general meeting of all the members. They wanted to discuss three agenda items: an evaluation of the activities of the board of directors, a discussion on the content and validity of the regulations adopted by that board and, last but not least, the removal of that board of directors and appointment of replacements. It was a brave, desperate but fruitless attempt to turn the tide. The PAB declared that, since those twenty-five companies had already lost their work permits, they should no longer be considered members of the Syndicate Chamber. Ipso facto, the PAB argued that their request to convene a meeting was inadmissible. Some weeks later, when the Syndicate Chamber held an extraordinary general meeting initiated by the board (and the PAB), the nineteen members present confirmed the decisions that had been made so far. They also rallied behind a number of statute changes, which increased the power of the board and made a repetition of this incident impossible. Clearly, the fruitless protest of the twenty-five distributors proved again how the Syndicate Chamber, as a 'corporation', did not really serve its members, but rather gave the PAB the opportunity to impose its will, outside of the Belgian legislation, and to have the result ratified by the Belgian board members.

Meanwhile, the Syndicate Chamber had been working, with the permission of the PAB, on the creation of a consortium company. The idea was that the film distributors, who had to suspend their activities but were unwilling or unable to sell the (approved) films that they still had in their possession, were given the opportunity to transfer these titles to a new, jointly owned consortium. The consortium would form a new distribution company and be 'set up on the principles of fairness and mutual brotherly assistance' under the supervision of the board of the Syndicate Chamber, which would obviously be in contact with the PAB.<sup>34</sup> After the abovementioned protest action of twenty-five distributors, this project was quietly buried.

Where did all of this lead to, eventually? In March 1942, when the corporate organisations published their bilingual *Cinema Yearbook* (*Cinema Jaarboek – Annuaire du Cinéma*), the membership lists of corporate organisations still mentioned twenty distributors: nineteen firms that had survived the stringent aforementioned selection process, and a new distributor, apparently specialising in the supply of non-feature films (under the company name *Comptoir du Film Complément*) and about which little more is known.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that the number of active distributors of feature films in Belgium, which had been estimated at 110

**ABEL - FILMS S.P.R.L.**  
**RAI - FILMS S.P.R.L.**  
**ASTORIA - FILMS**

ont l'honneur d'informer leur fidèle  
 clientèle qu'elles ont cédé la distribution  
 de leurs films à la Société Anonyme

**TRIUMPH-FILMS**

**S.A.**

dont la **nouvelle adresse** est

**24, rue Dupont, 24**  
**BRUXELLES III**

Téléphones : Département AR **17.82.88**  
 Département AS **17.33.61**  
 Département TR **17.37.95**

**Films autorisés pour toute la Belgique :**

	FILMS	Version	Métrage	Contrôle
TR	1. <b>Amour, quand tu nous tiens</b> . . . . .	allemande	2600 m.	Contrôlé
TR	2. <b>Sottises</b> . . . . .	viennoise	2500 m.	N. contrôlé
	Die ganz grossen Torheiten			
TR	3. <b>La Voix du Cœur</b> . . . . .	viennoise	2200 m.	Contrôlé
	Stimme des Herzens			
TR	4. <b>Tu es mon Bonheur</b> . . . . .	viennoise	2500 m.	Contrôlé
	Du bist mein Glück			
TR	5. <b>Au Pays de l'Amour</b> . . . . .	viennoise	2550 m.	Contrôlé
	Das Land der Liebe			

*One person's loss is another one's gain. In CINEMA magazine of 1 April 1942, Triumph-Films announces that henceforth it distributes the films that were previously included in the catalogue of three competitors, who were forced to close business on 1 January 1941. Over a year later, in May-June 1943, Triumph-Films is forced to cease its activities in its turn, and is absorbed by the unit consortium Cinégroup. The fact that the ad is in French only, suggests that it is directed mainly at French language cinemas. But at the bottom of the ad it is nevertheless clearly specified that they also offer German and Austrian films in the original version, which are approved for screening throughout the whole of Belgium.*

before the war, was further reduced, between December 1940 and March 1942, from 75 to 19. In reality, there were eighteen distributors left. When, in Nazi Germany, all German film companies were merged into one large holding (Ufi) in January 1942, the foreign offices of Tobis merged with (or rather, were absorbed by) the Ufa offices.<sup>36</sup> In the course of 1942,

this happened all over Europe, including in Belgium. Tobis retained a separate office for some time in Sint-Lazarusstraat (rue Saint-Lazare), but all rental activities took place at the Ufa office at Handelskaai (quai du Commerce). To the public eye, Tobis remained a separate independent distributor until the end of the occupation, but everyone in the business knew that Ufa and Tobis were interchangeable names for the same distribution house (located in the Ufa building).



*Schicksal* (Destiny, 1942) was a production by Wien-Film, directed by Géza von Bolváry, starring Heinrich George, Gisela Uhlen and Will Quadflieg. On this undated poster (from Albert Warie's collection), which was to be displayed at the box-offices, Ufa is mentioned as film distributor. However, in the advertisement (in which George wears a hat) published on 14 February 1943 in *CINEMA* magazine, Tobis is mentioned as distributor. From this announcement, published in *CINEMA* on 15 March 1943, it is clear that there was no *de facto* difference between Ufa and Tobis.

What did this mean for the film market specifically? In other words, how many films were still available for rental after this restructuring? The question is difficult to answer. The statistics are scarce and sometimes – but this is not unusual for a fluctuating market – contradict each other. In March 1941, the Syndicate Chamber informed the PAB that the restructuring would lead to a drop in the number of films that were *not* distributed by Ufa and Tobis. This number, still estimated at 950 titles in August 1940, dropped to 568. In the Syndicate Chamber's letter, it was bluntly stated that the films of Tobis and Ufa had not been included in this calculation because they 'don't have the same significance as those of the other companies.'<sup>37</sup> This was a clear acknowledgement – by the Syndicate Chamber! – of the fact that, behind the scenes, different rules were applied to Ufa and Tobis than to the non-German distributors. That, in principle, 568 films could remain in circulation, was in reality, however, not necessarily the case. Since the PAB had to approve the transfer of films, they were able to push certain films off the market. This explains why the number of films that were not distributed by Ufa or Tobis, was estimated at only 369 by the end of December 1941.<sup>38</sup> This was a decrease of over sixty percent compared to August 1940. Unfortunately, it is not known how many prints of these films were distributed.

Companies that wanted to make additional prints of specific titles in order to make their film distribution catalogue more profitable, had to request permission from the PAB as of



January 1, 1942.<sup>39</sup> It goes without saying that this mechanism allowed the PAB to stimulate or slow down the profitability of specific films and their distributors. Presumably, Ufa and Tobis benefited handsomely from the situation. In August 1941, the PAB stated that the Ufa and Tobis offices in Brussels had rented out an average of 455 prints on a weekly basis (275 for Ufa and 180 for Tobis) in a market that counted 736 large and small cinemas in total.<sup>40</sup> Knowing that most cinemas required one film (one print) a week, this statistic indicates that Ufa and Tobis serviced over sixty percent of cinemas in August 1941.

La Société Anonyme Belge

**PATHÉ  
CONSORTIUM  
CINEMA**

vous présente comme Étrennes

**Fernand Gravey - Max Dearly - Mireille Balin**  
dans

l'énorme succès  
**Si j'étais le Patron**  
qui passera sur tous les écrans.

Programmez ses  
**Productions de Choix**

A GRANDS FILMS!  
GRANDES VEDETTES!

**12, Rue Dupont, Bruxelles III** **Téléphone : 17.36.51**

Publicity from the Belgian branch of Pathé, published in CINEMA magazine of 1 January 1942. In this advertisement, Pathé boasts a 'New Year's gift' (étrennes): the film *Si j'étais le patron* (If I were the boss) directed by Richard Pottier. This film dates from 1934 but had not been released in Belgium at the time, causing the production to escape the ban (imposed in 1941) on films that had been released on the Belgian market prior to 1 June 1937. The fact that an older film, which at the time of its making had been deemed unworthy of release, was announced with much ado in 1942, illustrated the anaemia with which Pathé was struggling to cope as a result of German regulations. In May 1943, Pathé was forcibly absorbed in the consortium Cinégroup.

In May 1943, the ranks of the distributors were thinned out again. The Syndicate Chamber announced that companies now had to have at least eleven feature films in their catalogue in

order for them to remain operational.<sup>41</sup> The Belgian branch of Pathé and four smaller distributors (ACC, PDC, Sédif and Triumph-Films) lost their permits as a result of this. In contrast to previous forced closures, their films were not sold to competitors but were consolidated into a newly established 'corporate company' called Cinégroupe.<sup>42</sup> This new company was a so-called 'unit consortium'. The idea behind it was not new. As explained above, such a consortium had already been proposed during the restructuring of 1941, but the idea was dismissed after a number of companies had tried in vain to stop the board of directors of the Syndicate Chamber. Based on past events, it looks like the five affected companies opted for a more compliant attitude and 'voluntarily' agreed to the creation of a consortium. It is no coincidence that the new consortium company was given a French name. Cinégroupe distributed French films: older films, but also a few more recent ones, such as Pathé productions from 1941–1942.

By extracting data from internal correspondence of the Film Guild and by looking at advertisements published in the *CINEMA* magazine, we can deduct that by the end of the German occupation the direct representatives of the German film industry (Ufa/Tobis) still had up to thirteen competitors that distributed feature films. Compared to the pre-war competition, this figure was very low. However, compared to the situation in the occupied Netherlands, the figure was rather high. In the Netherlands, the distribution sector was reduced even further. The Dutch branch of Ufa/Tobis had a monopoly on German and French films. It had only four competitors: two relatively large companies (Sonora, which imported Italian films, and Odeon, which imported from other countries) and two small, nearly insignificant enterprises (Centrafilm, a distributor for fairy tale films, and Aafa-Film, which distributed a few Flemish films, in other words, some films made by Jan Vanderheyden and Edith Kiel).<sup>43</sup> It is unclear as to why competition was proportionally more tolerated in occupied Belgium than in the Netherlands. There are several possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that the PAB wanted to create the impression that, despite the strong German presence, there still was sufficient diversity. The fact that Tobis was still portrayed as an 'independent' distributor, points us in this direction. The aforementioned incident about the 'fabrications' of Mrs Delrez of Paris-Films similarly reflects the German determination to deny the German market dominance as much as possible. It is also possible that Belgian lobbying actions attributed to the continued operation of a fair number of distributors. After the war, a former PAB officer testified that Jan Vanderheyden had opposed the further reduction in the distribution sector and also refused to accept a total monopoly on Italian films for his own distribution house.<sup>44</sup> (The monopoly was eventually granted to his company, but he gave a number of licensed films to other distributors.) A third possible explanation lies in the fact that the occupying forces needed several Belgians as frontmen to implement the corporate policy outlined here, but also to act as 'owners' for cinemas that had been acquired by Germany. The distribution companies Alro, Atlas, Fama-Film and Idéal, for example, were all owned by Belgians who held positions in the Syndicate Chamber and/or played a role in the German control of large Belgian cinemas. It is quite possible that they were rewarded for their services with the authorisation to continue their distribution activities.

### Political and economic motivations

As described above, the restructuring of the distribution sector was aimed at limiting the number of Belgian film distributors and to increase German control over the film supply. Clearly, all of this was aimed at increasing the market share of German films. The German intention to reduce the presence of French (language) films was equally clear. However, no attempt was made to eliminate the non-German film supply completely. In this regard, several factors played a role.

The PAB had no interest in disrupting the Belgian film economy. The film supply could be modified, but within acceptable boundaries. The total prohibition of American and British films was already a major intervention. Could French films also be prohibited? That was not only mathematically impossible (see below), it was also rather undesirable from a pragmatic point of view. The PAB politics would have amounted to nothing if the public was snubbed and decided not to visit the cinemas anymore. That would have not only been a propaganda catastrophe, but also an economic disaster. Although we cannot further elaborate on this topic within the scope of this article, it should be noted that some of the largest and most profitable Belgian cinemas were in German hands during the occupation. Some were seized, while others had been purchased through frontmen.<sup>45</sup> The revenue generated by those cinemas went to Germany. Hence, for the occupier, it was of great economic importance that the large cinemas performed well, regardless of the films being screened there.

The economic rationale behind the promotion of German films was enormous. Since most German film companies had been nationalised (secretly bought by the German state) even before the start of World War II, the German government had an economic interest in providing German films with the largest possible market share internationally. However, ideological factors also played a part. It was assumed that German films would bring their audience closer to Germany in a spiritual and linguistic manner. This was especially important in 'Germanic' Flanders, where the occupying forces, through various regulating measures, pursued a rapprochement to a much greater extent than in French-speaking Belgium. A consequence of this Flemish-friendly policy (the so-called *Flamenpolitik*) was that French dubbed versions of German films could not be screened all over Belgium, but were only authorised in the francophone south of Belgium. In order to increase the Dutch speaking public's exposure to the German language as much as possible, the Flemish cinemas were only given access to the original German films (with subtitles). The only exception to this rule was *When the Sun Shines Again* (*Wenn die Sonne wieder scheint*, 1943), because the Flemish writer Stijn Streuvels had stipulated that the German film adaptation of his novel *De Vlaschaard* (*The Flax Field*) had to be dubbed in Flemish.<sup>46</sup> In Brussels, cinema owners were allowed to choose, which meant that many cinemas, when possible, screened French versions of German films.

During the war, most new German film productions were released in Belgium, with the exception of films that the PAB considered propagandistically counterproductive. Ufa and Tobis introduced new films of their German parent companies and other relatively large studios, like Terra and Wien-Film, to the market. New or older productions of smaller studios were awarded in dribs and drabs to smaller distributors. This happened through the PAB and

the Syndicate Chamber, which, as mentioned earlier, coordinated all import matters. However, this supply was not sufficient to meet the demand for new films. The impressive military successes that Nazi Germany had reached in 1939–1940, initially seemed to allow the German film industry to become a new kind of Hollywood and to refocus the European film industry on Germany. In order to turn that ambition into reality a continual output of new films, comparable to the American ‘studio system’, had to be established. As early as 1941, it became clear that the German studios could not achieve that ambition and would remain well below the proposed minimum of a hundred new films a year.<sup>47</sup> German production was therefore too low to meet the European demand for new films. This problem clearly came to the fore in Belgium, where it was calculated (also in 1941) that, for the Belgian market at that time (with approximately 880 theatre halls), a minimum of 111 new films and preferably between 130 and 160 would be required.<sup>48</sup> From a purely arithmetic point of view, it therefore became necessary to import older German films as well as non-German films. In other words, there was a need for imports from other film producing countries.

### The regulation of film imports

So which countries could one import films from? The first choice was France. From a political point of view, this was not an evident choice, because it consolidated the cultural ties with France and thus contradicted the above-mentioned *Flamenpolitik*. In order to minimise this effect, it was ordered that recent French films which had been dubbed in German (for the German market, which also needed imports) had to be screened in Flanders in that dubbed version. (In other words, those films could not be screened in their original version, at least not in the Flemish part of Belgium.)

Economically, however, there were at least two good reasons to import French films. First, behind the scenes, the German state funded a number of new top French productions. Alfred Greven, acting on behalf of the German trust company *Cautio GmbH* (through which the German government controlled the main German film companies), had established the production company *Continental Films* in Paris, in October 1940. The company was involved in high quality French language productions – films that according to Goebbels were too good and therefore too competitive – but was completely owned by the German state.<sup>49</sup> The successes recorded by *Continental* productions in France, Belgium (where *Ufa* and *Tobis* distributed them) and other countries, thus contributed to the German treasury. Since *Continental* also acted (in Belgium) as an international distributor of all new French films made by other producers, this import was also lucrative for Germany. Obviously, this economic logic was defended by Alfred Greven, who also served as German *Reichsbeauftragter* (Reich Appointee) for the German film interests in Belgium and France, and managed (through the *Bruciné* company) some large German-owned cinemas on the Belgian territory.<sup>50</sup> (Greven’s influence on the PAB must have been substantial, but is scarcely documented.)

Although it was politically and economically impossible to keep French films away from Flemish cinema audiences, this remained a difficult issue for the PAB. The Syndicate Chamber repeatedly instructed, via the PAB, that some older French films were no longer to be rented out to Flemish cinema owners. In February–March 1942, when the restructuring of the





This undated leaflet and poster (both from Albert Warie's collection) illustrate how Tobis (just as Ufa) also distributed films by Continental (Paris), which was led by Alfred Greven. *Annette et la Dame Blonde* (*Annette and the Blonde Woman*, 1941) was distributed by Tobis in both the original French version as in a German dubbed version. This German version, *Annette und die blonde Dame*, was mainly intended for the Flemish market, where the film was announced as *Annette en de blonde dame*.

distribution sector had ensured that Ufa and Tobis only had to deal with seventeen smaller competitors, those companies were informed that a whole series of French films were no longer to be distributed in Flanders. (Especially, but not exclusively, films that had become available because of the enforced closure of their competitors). As of October 1942, the rules were tightened again.<sup>51</sup> In this way, older French films, which were still allowed to be screened in Wallonia and Brussels, were excluded from the Flemish film supply. In other words, the supply of French-language films towards Flemish cinemas was never cut, but limited to more recent films that were either produced or imported by Continental (annex 2).

On a smaller scale, there were also recent or less recent films imported from regions that were occupied by Germany or that had established political alliances with Germany. The first category included Czech films. The latter category included Italian and to a lesser extent Hungarian and Spanish films. Such films were imported only if there was a German dubbed version, in other words if the film had been allowed into, and had been synchronised for the German market. The German version was then distributed (with subtitles) in the Flemish part of Belgium, whereas the rest of the country could choose between that German version or, if available, a dubbed French-language version. The French 'dubbing' was done in France or in Brussels by H.D.-Film, a German company that worked with French actors.

When deciding upon which non-German films were to be imported, the PAB had to consult the above-mentioned Alfred Greven, but was also dependent on the supply of two important firms: Greven's Continental (as exporter of French films) and Transit-Film.

The latter, a German company founded in November 1940 and part of the Ufi conglomerate since March 1942, acted as an importer/exporter for Germany and countries in the German sphere of influence.<sup>52</sup> The activities of Transit-Film and the general import/export of films throughout Europe were both steered by international agreements and by the German- and Italian-dominated International Film Chamber. Hence, the PAB could not choose films randomly, but was dependent on various individuals and organisations.



Advertisement, published in CINEMA on 1 February 1943. Jan Vanderheyden advertises *Juffrouw Ondeugd*, the German dubbed version of the Italian film *Scampolo* (1941), directed by Nunzio Malasomma.

In Belgium, Transit-Film was represented by Jan Vanderheyden's distribution office, which distributed some films itself and gave licenses for other films to other Belgian distributors.<sup>53</sup> When the Belgian Syndicate Chamber (re)joined the revived International Film Chamber (which it had cofounded in 1935) in July 1941, Jan Vanderheyden became the Belgian

representative (and chairman of the cinema section) within that organisation. On 29 January 1942, shortly after the German declaration of war against the United States, Vanderheyden urged the members of the Syndicate Chamber to ratify the decision of the International Film Chamber to boycott American films. All members present at the Syndicate Chamber meeting (fifteen film distributors) endorsed that decision. This did not change anything about the economic situation, since American films had been banned by the occupying forces since the summer of 1940. But symbolically it did make a difference, as it gave the impression that Belgian film distributors 'voluntarily' rallied behind the boycott. After the war, several signatories declared, justifiably or not, that they had been threatened: those who would have refused to sign, would have had to close their companies.<sup>54</sup>

Where did all of this ultimately lead to? How many films were imported annually and from which countries? Unfortunately, statistical figures are only available sporadically. But the figures that are available indicate a clear trend. From August 30, 1941 to September 1, 1942 (a period of one year), 139 films were imported to Belgium: 106 German, 22 French and 11 Italian productions.<sup>55</sup> In that period, Germany accounted for 76% of all imports, followed by France (16%) and Italy (8%). A year and a half later, the situation was quite different. In the last year of the occupation, from January to August 1944, over a period of eight months, another 48 fiction films were imported. Of these, exactly 50% (24 titles) came from France, which had again become the largest supplier of imports. Only a third of the films (16 titles) came from Germany. The remaining films came from Italy (5 films), Denmark, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia (1 film each).<sup>56</sup> As can be seen from these figures, the PAB tried very hard to hold sway over the supply of new films through the corporate organisations, but in the end these processes were mainly driven by events over which the PAB had no control. Just as the military successes at the beginning of the war had allowed the position of the German film to be strengthened, military setbacks and defeats at the end of the occupation caused it to loosen its grip on the market.

### **Streamlining the film distribution: mandatory distribution plans and rental conditions**

While, in the neighbouring Netherlands, the Netherlands Cinema Alliance had already introduced a compulsory standard agreement for film rentals in 1923–1924, and added a compulsory minimum entry fee for filmgoers in 1937, absolute freedom prevailed in pre-war Belgium.<sup>57</sup> With the exception of a few locations (such as Antwerp, where price agreements were made in 1939) every cinema owner was free to determine his/her entrance fees.<sup>58</sup> Given the pre-war oversupply of cinemas, this led to a bidding war in some cities, where some charged (had to charge) bottom prices in order to remain competitive. Thus, the conditions of film rental were subject to the law of the survival of the fittest. Usually, a fixed price was selected: a fixed amount that could not be changed, regardless of how big an audience the film eventually attracted. Powerful distributors of films that had already proven their success abroad, could have cinemas bid against each other, require unreasonably high, fixed prices or bind cinemas in other ways (such as blind selling and block-booking). At the other end of the spectrum, film distributors with a less powerful market position could be put under pressure by popular cinemas and be forced to rent out their films at very low, fixed fees. Before the German



invasion, widespread dissatisfaction with these practices existed in the Belgian film community. The corporate model that was imposed during the occupation also led to changes in these areas.

Concerning entry prices, the PAB intervened immediately. In conjunction with the Ordinance of 6 August 1940, several measures were introduced.<sup>59</sup> Henceforth, cinemas were divided into categories based on their location (large city, town, municipality) and other factors (such as their commercial location in relation to other cinemas and seating capacity). For each category, minimum prices were determined. Depending on the assigned category, a cinema could exercise the right to a first run (in other words, to be the first to screen a new film in their region or locality), or, after a designated waiting period, to be the first to show a film in second run, etcetera. Although these measures were imposed on cinemas, they clearly influenced the operation of the film distributors. A company releasing a new film, could no longer have cinemas bid against each other, but had to respect a formal picking order. Exceptions to this rule had to be applied for at the Syndicate Chamber.<sup>60</sup> The classification system was adapted several times during the war, but the principle remained unchanged. As of February 1942, this indirect control of film distribution was tightened through the announcement of distribution plans for new productions.<sup>61</sup> Such plans, which specified the trajectory for new films, only focused on big cities, but were later also issued for smaller provincial towns. Officially, these distribution plans aimed to eliminate mutual competition in order to allow each film to yield a maximum return. It seems likely that the distribution plans were also designed to avoid quarrels about the right to screen new imports, which became more and more scarce towards the end of the war.

Regarding the absence of a standard rental contract, a more cautious approach was followed. During the first year of the occupation, various regulations were imposed. Existing contracts were left untouched, but from October 1940 regulations were imposed for new contracts, including a ban on fixed rental prices, guidelines for rentals on a percentage basis, minimum rental prices, etcetera. As of 30 May 1941, the day before the new corporate fiscal year began, these regulations were combined and tightened. For older contracts, an exit scenario was included, but by 3 October 1941 all film distributors and exhibitors were obliged to adhere to new regulations, applicable to the whole of Belgium. The regulations specified mutual rights and obligations and imposed procedures to clarify any disputes.<sup>62</sup> Henceforth, distributors had to offer a complete film programme (feature film and *Kulturfilm*) as one package, using a standard contract that entitled the distributor to a percentage of the gross receipts (total income from ticket sales after deduction of taxes and copyright fees). The exact percentage the distributor could ask was negotiable, but there were clear top and bottom limits. The maximum rate was set to forty percent. The minimum rate was twenty-five percent for new films and twenty percent for reprisals. Anyone involved in fraudulent activities, such as lying about the actual number of filmgoers (which decreased the gross income and therefore the pay-out rate) would be punished severely and risked losing the permit. The new standard contract also stipulated that cinema owners paid a guaranteed minimum, of which the exact amount was to be determined by the distributor.

Wartime newspaper advertisements indicate that most cinemas did not change their programme during the week. Nevertheless, cinema owners were initially allowed to change

Plan de Distribution de la nouvelle Production				Distributieplan voor de nieuwe Productie				
I. - BRUXELLES-CENTRE				I. - BRUSSEL-CENTRUM				
Exclusivité Exclusiviteit	1 <sup>o</sup> Haut de la ville 1 <sup>o</sup> Bovenstad	1 <sup>o</sup> Bas de la ville 1 <sup>o</sup> Benedenstad	Studios Studio's	2 <sup>o</sup> Vision Bas de la ville 2 <sup>o</sup> Week Benedenstad	3 <sup>o</sup> Vision Bas de la ville 3 <sup>o</sup> Week Benedenstad	4 <sup>o</sup> Vision Bas de la ville 4 <sup>o</sup> Week Benedenstad	En reprise Reprise	
Eldorado	Queen's Hall	Caméo	Beaux-Arts (Films culturels et autres films en accord avec A. D. C. B. et Chambre S. D. F.)	Palladium	Roxy	Lutétia	Cinéphone	Normandie
Métropole	Capitole	Léopold III		Cinéac Centre	Trianon	Cigale	Pathé	Cinéac Nord
Plaza	Acropole	Agora	Schoone Kunsten (Cultuurfilms en andere films in overleg met V. K. B. B. en S.K.F.V.)	Ambassador	Marigny	Cinéma de la Ville	Arenberg	Crosly Nord
Scala	Vog	Galeries						

  

II. - FAUBOURG DE BRUXELLES II. - BRUSSELSCHЕ VOORSTEDEN				
Communes Gemeenten	1 <sup>o</sup> Vision 1 <sup>o</sup> Week	2 <sup>o</sup> Vision 2 <sup>o</sup> Week	3 <sup>o</sup> Vision 3 <sup>o</sup> Week	4 <sup>o</sup> Vision 4 <sup>o</sup> Week
St-Gilles	Rialto Dixi Elysée	Bristol Carly Crosly St pt	Luminor Tivoli	
Schaerbeek	Edison Rex Roxi	Artistic Pavy Nova	City Variétés	Cinex Id's
Anderlecht	Vallance Palace Kursaal	Lido Nova Rio	Midi-Palace	
Etterbeek	Albert Léopold Rex	Continental Eden Rio	Cinquanten, Wolu Cosmos	Casino (Auderghem) (Ouderghem)
Laeken Laken	Astra Rio Christine	Anvers Pal. Lux Rex	Roma (Ned.-over- Heembeek)	
Molenbeek	Forum Cristal Kinox	Pax Movy Léopold	Corso * Basilie * Ecran	Tabora Star
Ixelles Elsene	Flora Mogador A B C	Tokio Relais	Claudia Rio (Bollefort) (Boschvoorde)	
Forest Vorst	Après la 1 <sup>o</sup> Vision St-Gilles	Roma Kursaal Alfa Léo Floréal	Movy	
Uccle Ukkel	Na de 1 <sup>o</sup> Week St-Gilles		Molière Central	
St-Josse St-Joost	Mirano Century	Savoy Filmac	Royal Nord	

\*3<sup>o</sup> Vision après Léopold ou après 1<sup>o</sup> Vision Molenbeek.  
\* 3<sup>o</sup> Week na Léopold of na 1<sup>o</sup> Week Molenbeek.

  

III. - GROOT-ANTWERPEN Centrum.			
Exclusiviteit	Verlenging	1 <sup>o</sup> Week	Reprise
Rex Scala Eldorado	Studio Movy Studio 48	Astra Capitole Colliseum	Eden Cinéac Crosly Kursaal Plaza Stuart Studio Paris Splendid

Wijken.

Zeehoek		
1 <sup>o</sup> Week	2 <sup>o</sup> Week	Reprise
Dixi Festa National	American Majestic Rio	Victoria

Zuid

Zuid		
1 <sup>o</sup> Week	2 <sup>o</sup> Week	Reprise
Forum Kinox Caméo	Kémo Lido Alhambra	Peter Benoit Corso Ritz Zuidpool

  

Kiel	Borgerhout	Berchem	Hoboken	Merksem
Centra Real Modern Pal.	Luxor Roma	Berchem Pal. De Leeuw	Agora Géant Roxi (na 1 <sup>o</sup> week Kiel)	Astoria Merksem Pal.
2 <sup>o</sup> Week	Reprise	2 <sup>o</sup> Week en Reprise		Deurne 1 <sup>o</sup> Week
Caméo Micro Nova	Lux	Flora Nova Luxor (Groenen H.)		Rix Reo Plaza

This distribution plan, published in CINEMA magazine in 1942, indicates to film distributors which cinemas have the right to be the first to be offered a new film.

their programme and replace an unsuccessful feature film. As of November 1941, however, distributors were prohibited to supply more than one film per week to a particular cinema.<sup>63</sup> Apparently, this ban was circumvented by cinema owners who rented two films or more from various film distributors in the same week. In 1943, a total ban on 'second programmes' was introduced: throughout one week, a cinema could not change the programme it was offering.<sup>64</sup> This regulation, aimed at the widest possible dissemination of the available movies, was undoubtedly prompted by the increasing scarcity of new film releases and of sufficient prints of

new or older films. It is probably for the same reason that cinemas, who had been given a new film and who had attracted a number of filmgoers that the corporative organisations considered sufficient, were forced to retake the film in the next week. This rule, introduced in July 1942, indicates again the scarcity of new film titles.<sup>65</sup>

In April 1944, (unspecified) 'exceptional events' resulted in a drastic reduction of the obligatory minimum percentage rates.<sup>66</sup> The guaranteed minimum film distributors could ask was also abolished. It is possible that such measures were intended to help cinema owners, who were losing clients because of air-raid alarms (in cities in particular) and because the irregular supply of electricity impeded working conditions.

### **Conclusion – future research paths**

This article focused on the German reforms of Belgian film distribution, their motives and consequences. It has been demonstrated that the PAB, through various measures, reduced the number of Belgian film distributors and the number of films offered by them, in order to fortify the market position of German films and of German film distributors Ufa and Tobis. Nevertheless, these measures did not lead to a complete German market monopoly. This would have been politically undesirable but also turned out to be economically impossible. Indeed, the cultural, ideological but also undeniable economic mission to make German films as strong as possible in occupied Belgium, proved incompatible with the German war economy. Germany's military successes had made it possible to seize an economic market, but the subsequent military setbacks and defeats contributed to the inadequate capitalisation of that market advantage.

Towards the end of the occupation it became more and more clear that the German film industry was unable to supply the number of new productions for which the PAB had created a market. As film imports from Germany slowed down, the market position of other, and in particular of French films, strengthened again. Economically, the German state still benefited from this situation. As the owner of Continental (which licensed its own productions to the Belgian branches of Ufa and Tobis, while licensing other French films to other Belgian distributors), as the owner of Transit-Film (which regulated the exports from other countries like Hungary and Italy) and as the owner of important Belgian cinemas (through the Bruciné chain, for instance), the German state profited from the successes of French and other films as well. Nevertheless, from a cultural and political point of view, Germany had failed the opportunity to dethrone the French film.

During the occupation so many regulations were imposed on Belgian distributors that it was impossible to discuss all of them within the context of this article. There is, for example, no room to go deeper into the guidelines about the production of publicity material (such as the prohibition of French advertisements in Flanders as of 1 January 1942)<sup>67</sup> or the use of such materials, which had to remain intact as much as possible in times of paper scarcity.<sup>68</sup> Little attention has also been given to the removal of older short films from the market (as for feature films, a ban was introduced for productions that were already on the market before 1 June 1937, except for productions with 'a special or artistic value'), the registration of translated film titles (probably to eliminate the habit of translating one film title in different ways) and the regulation of the 16 mm market, where the newly established Brussels office of the German company

Tobis-Degeto (fairly quickly renamed to Orbis-Film) gained a dominant position.<sup>69</sup> The regulation of regular working hours for film distributors' employees was not mentioned either, but deserves to be, because it illustrates how certain corporate-imposed regulations had a positive effect on labour conditions. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that some of the measures imposed by the occupying forces, including the renting on a percentage basis, were desperately needed. In post-war Belgium, film rental on a percentage basis would become standard practice, but without the long-term retention of a minimum or maximum percentage.<sup>70</sup> In other words, it must be acknowledged that some measures introduced under the banner of corporatism, sometimes contained positive elements and addressed problems that had existed before the war.

But even if some measures that were imposed during the occupation sometimes had positive effects, this in no way justifies the authoritarian way in which they were imposed and carried out. There can be no doubt about the fact that the German film policy and its implementation in general had devastating effects. Removing older films from the market and enforcing the closure of dozens of distributors was a seizure of power, where the occupier enforced its privilege as the strongest economy to penetrate the Belgian film market. For dozens of distributors and their staff, this meant nothing less than taking the food out of their mouths. This kind of exploitative politics should be examined further. After all, this article provides no insight into the actual impact the anti-Semitic policies of the occupying forces possibly had on the Belgian distribution sector. This is by no means due to a lack of interest by the author, but rather to a lack of (as far as we know) source material. One may assume that some film distributors were of Jewish origin and that their film companies were taken away through forced closure and/or expropriation. It is noteworthy that little attention has been given in the post-war trials to the consequences of that anti-Semitic policy. Also, other sources consulted by the author, including the *Ciné Belge* magazine, which during and after the occupation repeatedly called for a strict punishment of compatriots involved in the German film policy, have thus far not yielded any further information.

Finally, this article also provides ideas for additional research in other areas. In the short term, the author hopes to pursue a similar analysis of the politics regarding the second corporate group, namely the cinema owners. This should provide the foundations for further research into the concrete results of that policy: a reconstruction of the film supply, examining the catalogues that the distributors were able to offer and the films actually screened by the theatres (a complex story, which is different for Flanders and French-speaking Belgium respectively), case studies on the experiences of specific distribution companies (how many films did they offer, how strong was their market?) but also detailed research on the impact certain measures had on specific cinema owners and the public that frequented their cinemas.

## Notes

1. B. G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2016).
2. This article provides an in-depth analysis of some trends that were concisely identified in R. Vande Winkel, "German Influence on Belgian Cinema, 1933–45: From Low-profile Presence to Downright Colonisation," in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. R. Vande Winkel and D. Welch (Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 (revised edition)), 77–78.



3. The 'La Gilde du Film' files (293/49) were consulted at the former archives of the Prosecutor-General of the Military Court in Brussels (AG). The bilingual magazine *Cinema/Cinéma* (referred to in this article as *CINEMA*) is only fully available in the collections of the Royal Film Archive (Cinematek) in Brussels. (The AG also features a complete collection, but it is not open to researchers.) The reports of the Propaganda Staffel B and the Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien are only available from the beginning of the occupation until March 1942 (later reports are missing) and can be consulted on microfilm at the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (SOMA) in Brussels. Wartime issues from the magazine *Ciné Belge*, which appeared illegally during the occupation, can be retrieved in full at the Belgian War Press portal (<https://warpress.cegesoma.be/>). Later issues, published in liberated Belgium, can be found at the Royal Film Archive (Cinematek) in Brussels.
4. The only detailed study known to the author is I. Schiweck, '[...] Weil wir lieber im Kino sitzen als in Sack und Asche'. *Der deutsche Spielfilm in den besetzten Niederlanden 1940–1945* (Münster: Waxmann, 2002), 182–199. Also very relevant is L.-M. Sørensen, *Dansk Film under Nazismen* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2014), 119–143 and 206–239. Sørensen, however, focuses primarily on German attempts to create new film distributors or distribution contracts and less on the fate of existing film distributors.
5. Schiweck, *Weil wir lieber*, 58 and 74–75. "Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (August 1941)," 58 (SOMA). It took some time before the *Propaganda Staffel B* was renamed to the *Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*. For the sake of clarity, this article constantly refers to the PAB.
6. 'Le major Allemand Kentel ou Rensel' is mentioned in "La corporation cinématographique au cours de la guerre," 18.1.1944 (AG). This detailed, anonymous document must be treated with caution because it was obviously written by a key person who wanted to protect himself/herself. The suspected author is Robert Vanden Neste (senior). On Frank Hensel, see also: R. Aurich, "Cinéaste, Collector, National Socialist Frank Hensel and the Reichsfilmarchiv," *Journal of Film Preservation* 64, no. 4 (2002): 16–23. and in particular 17.
7. Published in German, Dutch and French in the *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs*, 7 August 1940, 145–147.
8. The following paragraphs, unless otherwise stated, are based primarily on these records. Armand Heilporn, "Rapport d'Expertise Comptable en cause de Chambre Syndicale de la Cinématographie, ADTCB – ADCB – Gilde du Film," 15 July 1946 (AG); Anonymous [Vanden Neste?], "La corporation cinématographique..." (AG); "Chambre Syndicale Belge de la Cinématographie et des Industries qui s'y rapportent," 21 February 1945 (AG).
9. Anonymous [Vanden Neste?], "La corporation cinématographique..."
10. R. Vande Winkel and D. Van Engeland, *Edith Kiel & Jan Vanderheyden. Pioniers van de Vlaamse film* (Brussel: Cinematek, 2014), 97–104 and 114.
11. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 3 (1 January 1941): 18. "Kwakkels den kop ingedrukt!," *CINEMA* 1, no. 5 (1 February 1941): 32.
12. Vande Winkel, "German influence", 79.
13. Vande Winkel and Van Engeland, *Edith Kiel*, 104.
14. See various national case studies in Vande Winkel and Welch, *Cinema and the Swastika*.
15. R. Vande Winkel, "Nazi Newsreels in Europe, 1939–1945: The Many Faces of Ufa's Foreign Weekly Newsreel (Auslandstonwoche) Versus Germany's Weekly Newsreel (Deutsche Wochenschau)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 1 (2004): 5–34.
16. Circular number 17 of the Syndicate Chamber, 2 August 1940 (AG).
17. It would take until 1 May 1941 before the Belgian board of film censors was abolished, apparently on suggestion of Jan Vanderheyden. Films that had been released after the German invasion, no longer had to be submitted to that board. Decision of the Belgian censors regarding older films (that had been released before the war) apparently still applied. A.-M. Poels, "De organisatie van het filmbedrijf tijdens de bezetting van '40-'44: de censuur," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 27, no. 3–4 (1997): 419–430. Circular number 120 "Filmcensuur – Belgische controlecommissie" van de Belgische Syndicale Kamer van Filmverhuurders, 21 april 1941 (AG). See also: A.-M. Poels, "Achter het zilveren scherm. Het cinemabeleid tijdens de bezetting van 1940–1944" (MA thesis Universiteit Gent, 1997), an impressive achievement in the light of limited source material at her disposal. Since she had no access to the 'Guild du Film' court case files, she relied too heavily on some other documents that seem more neutral or reliable than they actually are. This applies for instance on the abovementioned report "La corporation Cinématographique au cours de la guerre" (18/01/1944) [probable author: Robert Vanden Neste (senior.)], which can be found at AG and also at SOMA. This also applies on "Rapport sur le cinéma Belge sous l'occupation Allemande (Juin 1940 – Février 1943)", which can also be found at AG and SOMA. (The preserved prints of this document

contain, in handwriting, the name of journalist Léon Duwaerts, but it is unclear whether he was the author.) Such documents should be treated with extreme caution, in order to avoid unbalanced conclusions or misinterpretations. For these reasons, without belittling Poels' achievements, no further reference is made to her MA thesis.

18. "'Jahresbericht'", 61. Circular number 33 of the Syndicate Chamber, 23 August 1940 (AG).

19. "Rapport sur le cinéma Belge sous l'occupation Allemande (Juin 1940 – Février 1943)", 7 (AG). The preserved prints of this document carry the name of journalist Léon Duwaerts, but it is unclear whether he was the author (see also note 17).

20. "Les opérations du marché noir faites pendant l'occupation pour échapper à l'amende", *Ciné Belge*, 13 April 1945, 10.

21. "Jahresbericht", 59. The figure of 110 may be slightly inaccurate: 101 were mentioned in the last pre-war yearbook of the film industry. F. Martin ed., *Le Bottin du Cinéma Belge 1938–1939* (Brussel, s.d.), 83–91.

22. "Het corporatief leven", *CINEMA* 1, no. 1 (1 December 1940): 49. An analytical overview of the regulations that were issued through this magazine, was written in a seminar on film historiography, under the guidance of the author. See E. De Beir, "Een analyse van het vakblad van het filmgilde. 'Cinema' als regulator van het Belgische filmwezen tijdens de Duitse bezetting," (Universiteit Antwerpen, 2011).

23. Vande Winkel, "From Low-profile Presence", 81.

24. Robert Vanden Neste, Letter to the Propaganda Staff B, 6 December 1940 (AG).

25. "Jahresbericht", 60.

26. Vande Winkel and Van Engeland, *Edith Kiel*, 105–109.

27. The ban on negotiations, either directly or through intermediaries in connection with the purchase of foreign films, was stressed several times, including in a circular on 22 February 1941 and in "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 12 (15 May 1941): 6.

28. "Jahresbericht", 60.

29. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 7 (1 March 1941): 7. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 9 (1 April 1941): 8.

30. At the start of December 1940, there were seventy-five, as mentioned above. As mentioned, Paris-Film was closed soon afterwards (due to the spreading of 'false rumors'). Two other companies (Abaci and Phonora Films) are also not mentioned in the regulation of March-April 1941 and were presumably already closed at that time. The fate of SOBECI is unclear, that company is mentioned sometimes and sometimes not.

31. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 9 (1 April 1941): 8. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 10 (15 April 1941): 12.

32. "Jahresbericht", 62.

33. This is evident from an advertisement from 1942, reproduced in Vande Winkel and Van Engeland, *Edith Kiel*, 109.

34. Various documents in the folder "Chambre Syndicale Belge des Distributeurs de Films" (AG).

35. Belgische Syndicale Kamer van Filmverhuurders en Vereniging der Cinemabestuurders van België ed., *Cinema Jaarboek 1942* (s.l., s.d.), 17 and 53. This is the only yearbook published during the occupation. No place or date of publication is mentioned, but the publication was announced in "De uitgave van het jaarboek" *CINEMA* 2, no. 7 (1 March 1942): 5.

36. D. Welch & R. Vande Winkel, "Europe's New Hollywood? The German Film Industry Under Nazi Rule, 1933–45," in *Cinema and the Swastika*, ed. Vande Winkel and Welch, 19.

37. Letter from Robert Vanden Neste to the PAB, 14 March 1941 (AG). Original quote: '(...) ausgenommen die von Tobis und Ufa, welche nicht dieselbe Bedeutung haben als die der andere Firmen.'

38. Situation des firmes au point de vue des films autorisés et poursuivant leur activité après le 31 December 1941 – Situation au 13 October 1941" (AG). The PAB had previously reported 382 films, but the operation was not yet completed at that time. Cf. "Jahresbericht", 62.

39. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 2, no. 3 (1 January 1942): 14.

40. "Jahresbericht", 69.

41. "Rapport sur le cinéma Belge sous l'occupation Allemande (juin 1940 - février 1943)", p. 40 bis (AG).

42. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 3, no. 11 (1 June 1943): 5, 15. See an advertisement of Cinégroup *Cinema* 3, no. 18 (15 September 1943): 4.

43. Schiweck, *Weil wir lieber*, 194–199. Thanks to the late Karel Dibbets for empirically testing this data (with positive results) against the Cinema Context database (<http://www.cinemacontext.nl>) and for critically reading this article in full.

44. Walter Camp testimony, captured by a notary in Hamburg, 26 September 1949 (AG).

45. R. Vande Winkel, "De bezette bioscoop," in *De verlichte stad*, ed. D. Biltereyst and P. Meers (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2007), 74–75.
46. In order to distribute this version in the Netherlands, Flemish dialect was avoided. R. Vande Winkel and I. Van Linthout, *De Vlaschaard 1943. Een Vlaams boek in nazi-Duitsland en een Duitse film in bezet België*, (Kortrijk-Brussel: Groeninghe 2007), 151–154.
47. Welch and Vande Winkel, "Europe's New Hollywood?", 19.
48. Letter by Jan Vanderheyden to the International Film Chamber, 1 September 1941 (AG).
49. E. Fröhlich ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil II Diktate 1941–1945. Band 4. April-Juni 1942* (München: K.G. Saur Verlag 1995), 317 (diary entry for 19 May 1942).
50. Vande Winkel, "German Influence", 77. B. Bowles, "The Attempted Nazification of French Cinema, 1934–44", in *Cinema and the Swastika*, ed. Vande Winkel and Welch, 132–138.
51. Syndikale Kamer - Rundschreibenentwurf, 23 February 1942, 10 March 1942 and 21 September 1942 (AG).
52. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order*, 191.
53. Letter of the PAB to the Syndicate Chamber, 6 October 1942 (AG).
54. Including the testimony of René Briais (Sédif) of 24 June 1947 (AG).
55. RV/PDV – N 6.307, 23-09-1942 (AG).
56. Calculations based on "Films uitgekomen tijdens het 1<sup>e</sup> semester 1944," *CINEMA* 4, no. 14 (15 July 1944): 9; and "Films uitgekomen tijdens de maand juli 1944," *CINEMA* 4, no. 16 (15 August 1944): 5. Not taken into account: *Tiergarten Süd Amerika* (1941) and *Symphonie des Nordens. Eine Dichtung in Bild und Ton über Norwegens Landschaft* (1941), two feature-length documentaries that were released in June 1944.
57. K. Dibbets, "Het bioscoopbedrijf tussen twee Wereldoorlogen," in *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Film en Bioscoop tot 1940*, ed. K. Dibbets and F. van der Maden, 2nd rev. ed. (Houten: Het Wereldvenster, 1986), 254–257.
58. "Jaarverslag over 1939 van de Gewestelijke Afdeling der Provincie Antwerpen van de Vereniging der Kinemabestuurders van België," *Weekblad Cinema* 20, no. 11 (15 March 1940): 5.
59. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 1 (December 1940): 47–50.
60. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 9 (April 1941): 8.
61. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 2, no. 5 (1 February 1942): 7–8.
62. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 13 (1 June 1941): 6. "Grondslagen van het cinemastatuut: algemene voorwaarden geldende inzake filmverhuur" and "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 15 (1 July 1941): 1, 4–8.
63. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 24 (15 November 1941): 13.
64. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 3, no. 3 (February 1943): 14.
65. Circular number 282 of the Syndicate Chamber, 11 July 1942 (AG). Circular number 288 of the Syndicate Chamber, 12 August 1942 (AG).
66. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 4, no. 10 (15 May 1944): 5.
67. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 23 (1 November 1941): 6.
68. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 8 (15 March 1941): 8.
69. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 5 (1 February 1941): 13. See also the second German ordinance relating to film, published in the *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich für die besetzten Gebiete Belgiens und Nordfrankreichs*, 7 May 1941, p. 588–589. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 1, no. 11 (1 May 1941): 12. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 2, no. 11 (1 May 1942): 10 and 15. "Het corporatief leven," *CINEMA* 2, no. 23, 1 November 1942): 6.
70. T. van Oort, "Industrial Organization of Film Exhibitors in the Low Countries: Comparing the Netherlands and Belgium, 1945–1960," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 2016 (online), 13, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2016.1157294>

## Biography

**Roel Vande Winkel** (PhD) is assistant professor at the KU Leuven (Institute for Media Studies) and at the LUCA School of Arts. He is associate editor of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. He wrote three co-authored monographs related to Belgian/German film history and edited the volumes *Cinema and the Swastika* (with David Welch), *Perspectives on European Film and History* (with Leen Engelen) and *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship around the World* (with Daniel Biltereyst). This article emanates from his ongoing research on film distribution and exhibition in Europe (1939–1945) and on the German reorganisation of the Belgian cinema (1940–1944).

### Annex 1: An overview of Belgian film distributors in occupied Belgium

This alphabetical overview focuses on companies distributing feature films to professional cinemas, in other words, on distributors of 35 mm prints of feature films. It is possible that these companies also distributed other films (for example, short films) or 16 mm films. Nevertheless, this overview does not contain companies that exclusively specialised in 16 mm films, programme pictures or advertising films. This list contains only the names of distributors that were mentioned during the occupation in the correspondence of the Syndicate Chamber and/or the Film Guild. The list is therefore not exhaustive. Most likely, names of smaller distributors are missing, who were active shortly before the German invasion, but did not or could not distribute films during the occupation.

NAME	DEVELOPMENT/EVENT
ABACI	Disappeared in the spring of 1941 for unknown reasons.
ABC #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
ABEL #	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
ACC (Agence Centrale Cinématographique) *	Absorbed in Cinégroupe in May-June 1943.
ACE (Alliance Cinématographique Européenne)	Disappeared at the start of the occupation (see Ufa).
ALRO *	Active throughout the entire occupation period. Perhaps less active in 1944.
ARTISTES ASSOCIÉS (United Artists)	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films. Had probably been inactive since the German invasion.
ARTISTIC #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
ASTORIA #	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
ATLAS FILMS *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
ATOS *	Active throughout the entire occupation period. Perhaps less active in 1944.
AUORE	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
BELGA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
BELGO-LUXEMBOURGEOIS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
BIFO	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
BODART & Co. #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
BROGNIEZ #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
CCB (Compagnie Cinématographique Belge) *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
CDL (Consortium des Loueurs de Films de Belgique) *	Active throughout the entire occupation period. Perhaps less active in 1944.
CIF (Compagnie Internationale du Film) #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
CINE CONSORTIUM BELGE	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
CINE RADIO PRESSE #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
CINEGROUPE	Founded in May 1943 as a consortium. Distributed films previously distributed by ACC, Pathé Consortium, PDC, Sédif and Triumph Films.
COLUMBIA	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films.

(Continued)

NAME	DEVELOPMENT/EVENT
CONBELCI #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
CONCORDIA #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
DELTA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
DISTRIBUTEURS REUNIS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
EMKA FILMS *	Active throughout the entire occupation period. Possibly inactive during the last months of the occupation.
EUROPA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
EXCELSIOR FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
EXPLOITANTS REUNIS	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
FAMA-FILM *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
FILMA	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
FILMAVOX #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
FILMCO	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
FILMEAC #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
FILMHOUSE	Could not or was not allowed to reopen after the capitulation of the Belgian army. Inactive during the occupation period.
FILMSONOR *	This company was first allowed to remain active after 31 December 1941, but had to close its doors on 31 January 1942. The owner had supplied incorrect information about his distribution catalogue, in order to meet the requirements.
FOX FILMS	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films.
GAUMONT FRANCO AUBERT	Was allowed to officially reopen, but in fact, closed their doors because all the films in their catalogues were rejected by the PAB. Inactive throughout the entire occupation period.
GEXE (Grandes Exclusivités Européennes) *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
GPA (Grandes Productions Artistiques) *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
IBIS FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
IDEAL FILM *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
IFD (International Film Distributors)	See Vanderheyden-Film. (Due to its English name, IFD resorted to using the less agonistic 'Vanderheyden-Film' during the war.)
IMPA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
IMPERATOR FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
VANDERHEYDEN-FILM (IFD) *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
LEDROU	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941. (Previously referred to as Ledrou-Lootens, thus they possibly merged temporarily.)
LOOTENS FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941. (Previously referred to as Ledrou-Lootens, thus they possibly merged temporarily.)

(Continued)

NAME	DEVELOPMENT/EVENT
LUNA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
LUX FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
MB	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
MERCURE FILMS (also known as MERCATOR Films)	Disappeared at the start of the occupation (see Tobis).
MGM (Metro Goldwyn Mayer)	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films.
MINERVA #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
MONDIAL #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
MONOPOL FILM *	Active throughout the entire occupation period.
NOVA	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
NYFA (New York Film Association)	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
OIF (Office International du Film)	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
OLYMPIA FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
OSSO FILMS *	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941. The only one of the companies forced to close in 1941 which also ratified the exclusion of fellow members in the new statutes (and thus its own closure) on 11 August 1941.
PARAMOUNT FILMS	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films.
PARIS FILMS	Closed in January 1941 because the owner openly criticised the German film politics.
PATHE CONSORTIUM	Threatened to be closed down on 31 December 1941, but was still allowed to remained open. Absorbed in Cinégroup in May–June 1943.
PAX FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
PDC *	Absorbed in Cinégroup in May–June 1943.
PHONORA FILMS	Disappeared in the spring of 1941 for unknown reasons.
PRINCEPS FILMS #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
PROCINE	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
RAI (Représentation Artistique Internationale de Films)	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
RKO	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films.
SEDIF	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941.
SELECT #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
SICA	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
SIDEF	Threatened to be closed down on 31 December 1941, but was still allowed to remained open. Absorbed in Cinégroup in May–June 1943.

(Continued)

NAME	DEVELOPMENT/EVENT
SOBECI #	Had to close down permanently on 31 December 1941, but had possibly discontinued operations as early as the spring of 1941.
STEVENS FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
THALIA FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
TOBIS *	Officially established on 25 September 1940, but already active before that. Incorporated the activities of its former distributor Mercure/Mercator. In theory, remained active for the entire occupation period but was no longer an independent distributor as of 1942, but a mouthpiece through which Ufa operated.
TRIUMPH-FILMS *	Absorbed in Cinégroupe in May–June 1943.
UDIF (Union des Distributeurs Indépendants des Films)	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft) *	Officially established on 22 August 1940, but already active before that. Incorporated the activities of its former distributor ACE. Remained active during the entire period of occupation.
UFI (Union des Films Internationaux) #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
UNION FILMS	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
UNIVERSAL FILMS	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films. Had probably been inactive since the German invasion.
VAN GOITSENHOVEN #	Had to close down permanently on 31 July 1941.
WARNER FILMS	As of July/August 1940, distribution activities were ceased as a result of the total ban on American films. Had probably been inactive since the German invasion.

#: One of the twenty-five companies that convened an extraordinary general meeting on 8 July 1941, opposing (in vain) their closure and the leadership of the Syndicate Chamber.

\*: One of the nineteen companies who, on 11 August 1941, ratified the statute amendments of the Syndicate Chamber and the exclusion of their fellow members.

## Appendix 2: Distribution mechanisms, 1943–1944

The diagram below provides an overview of the agreements/regulations concerning the allocations of new films, as imposed on distributors by the PAB and the Film Guild. This provides a situational report starting from the autumn of 1943, after the last major restructuring of the film industry (merging five small distributors into the Cinégroupe consortium).



COMPANY NAME	AGREEMENTS
UFA-FILMS TOBIS-FILMS	Monopoly on all new films of German origin (in the original German version and in dubbed French version) and on all films produced by Continental (Paris).
JAN VANDERHEYDEN-FILM (Formerly INTERNATIONAL FILM DISTRIBUTORS)	Monopoly (as a Belgian license holder) on films of Italian origin and on films from other countries, which were offered on the international market by Transit-Film. These films were distributed in a German dubbed version by Jan Vanderheyden-Film. The dubbed French versions were licensed by Jan Vanderheyden-Film to other distributors. Those distributors were chosen by the PAB and the Film Guild.
CDL	Feature-length cultural films (Kulturfilme) and possibly also cultural shorts.
ALRO ATLAS FILMS ATOS CINÉGROUPE EMKA FAMA-FILMS GEXEFILM GPA IDÉAL FILMS MONOPOL FILMS	Films of French origin. These films were exported by Continental (Paris), but were not Continental productions. These companies were also eligible for the distribution of dubbed French films imported through Transit-Film and Jan Vanderheyden-Film (see above).

Source: AG, Correspondence between the PAB and the Film Guild, November 1943.